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THE STATUE OF ATHENA PARTHENOS

RECENTLY FOUND AT ATHENS.



Fig. 1.—ATHENA.

BAS-RELIEF IN THE MUSEUM AT BERLIN.

REPRODUCED FROM THE "GAZETTE DES BEAUX-ARTS."

shapeless, the toes of the feet separated by parallel incisions, as in the wooden dolls sold in the open-air stalls on New Year's day ; the sphinx which supports the crest, and the griffins which flank it right and left, are altogether grotesque. A meritorious attempt has been made to give the grace of the features and the smile of the mouth ; but, alas ! it has miscarried completely. Mr. Newton has, it seems to me, done too much honor to this marble by attributing it to the time of Hadrian.³ I believe it to be sixty or eighty years later ; that is to say, I would place its execution in the last years of the second century, or even in the beginning of the third. We have works of much more skilful execution even of the time of Gordian. Nor is it possible, as in the case of the statuette found in the temple of Theseus by Charles Lenormant (Fig. 3), and published in this journal by his son, to attribute the grossness of the work to the negligence or the hurry of the artist. That is a work "which shows that a very wise man has applied himself to it."

From the point of view of archaeology, on the contrary, our statue is of sufficiently great interest. It does not, indeed, supply us with unexpected revelations, or with information of capital importance concerning the work of which it pretends — somewhat presumptuously — to be a copy. But it converts into assured facts certain hypotheses which until now were only probable, and solves questions upon which sceptical people might have continued to split hairs. It confirms, almost from one end to the other, the ideas of M. François Lenormant ; justifies the importance attached by him to the unfinished statue of the Theseion, and proves the entire exactness of the

¹ François Lenormant, *La Minerve du Parthénon*, in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Vol. VIII. pp. 129, 202, and 278.

² I embrace the occasion to call attention to this excellent repertory, which reflects the greatest honor upon our school at Athens. Although principally devoted to epigraphy, it nevertheless does not neglect the arts, and publishes excellent reproductions of marbles, terra-cottas, and bronzes found in Greece. [See a quotation from the article in question, concerning the traces of color found on the statue, in the paragraph on *The Statuette of Athena Parthenos*, p. 257, first division of this volume of the REVIEW.]

³ See *Academy*, Feb. 12th, 1881, p. 124. [Quoted in the REVIEW, first division of this volume, p. 257.]

text of Pausanias, from which Simart departed wrongfully in several points. Thus, for example, it shows that the serpent Erichthonios was really at the left of the goddess, in the cavity of the shield; that the helmet was surmounted by only one sphinx, flanked by griffins; and that it did not have upon the visor the heavy and baroque garniture of galloping horses, which had been borrowed from tetradrachmas of the Macedonian period and from the intaglio of Aspasios.

The statue of the Varvakeion, therefore, gives us the *ensemble* of the work of Pheidias more completely than we have heretofore had it. This is its great but only merit, since, for every detail separately considered, we possess already a more instructive document. For the helmet we must go to a small head in bronze which, three or four years ago, was offered to the Louvre by a Greek travelling merchant, and which, if I am not mistaken, was bought by the British Museum.¹ One of the griffins placed alongside of the crest is

still perfectly preserved in this head, and is superb in its movement. For the position of the body, the movement of the legs, the form of the ægis, and the arrangement of the double tunic, we can wish for nothing better than the magnificent fragment found in 1859 not far from the Propyleia. This work, published by Michaelis,² is almost contemporaneous with the Parthenos, and in its drawing preserves tolerably well the majesty of the lines of the model, but does not reproduce its grandeur and suppleness. For the basis, the statuette of the Theseion is still the only document which completes the texts of Pliny and Pausanias. As to the battle of the Athenian heroes with the Amazons, carved upon the shield, we are even yet restricted to the mediocre and uncertain indications of the same statue, and of the Strangford shield. The coins (Figs. 4 and 5), finally, give us only the lance which the goddess held against the rim of the shield with the thumb of her left hand; they also indicate with the greatest exactitude the position of the Victory, showing her completely turned towards Athena. The three-quarter position adopted by the sculptor in the Varvakeion statue is neither logically admissible nor is it satisfactory to the eye.

By way of compensation for the problems which it solves, the statue of the Varvakeion raises another. The Victory in gold and ivory, which the Parthenos held upon her extended right hand, measured six feet in height; it was therefore a statue of natural size. Even if we suppose that the wooden kernel placed inside was as light as possible; that the gold of the vestments was hammered, which would allow of great thinness; and that, finally, the ivory inlays were of the slightest, the weight of this Victory must nevertheless have been considerable. Would a metal bar, placed horizontally in the right arm of the Parthenos, have been sufficient to sustain it? Or was a vertical support thought indispensable, however inelegant it might have been? If this support existed only in the statue of the Varvakeion, we might attribute its addition to the timidity of the sculptor, and to the necessities of the material he employed. But it is also represented on an Athenian bas-relief (Fig. 1) of the period of independence. No motive of stability can here be made a pretext: if the author of this bas-relief has figured a small column under the hand of Athena, it must be because he had seen it in the Parthenon. However, since

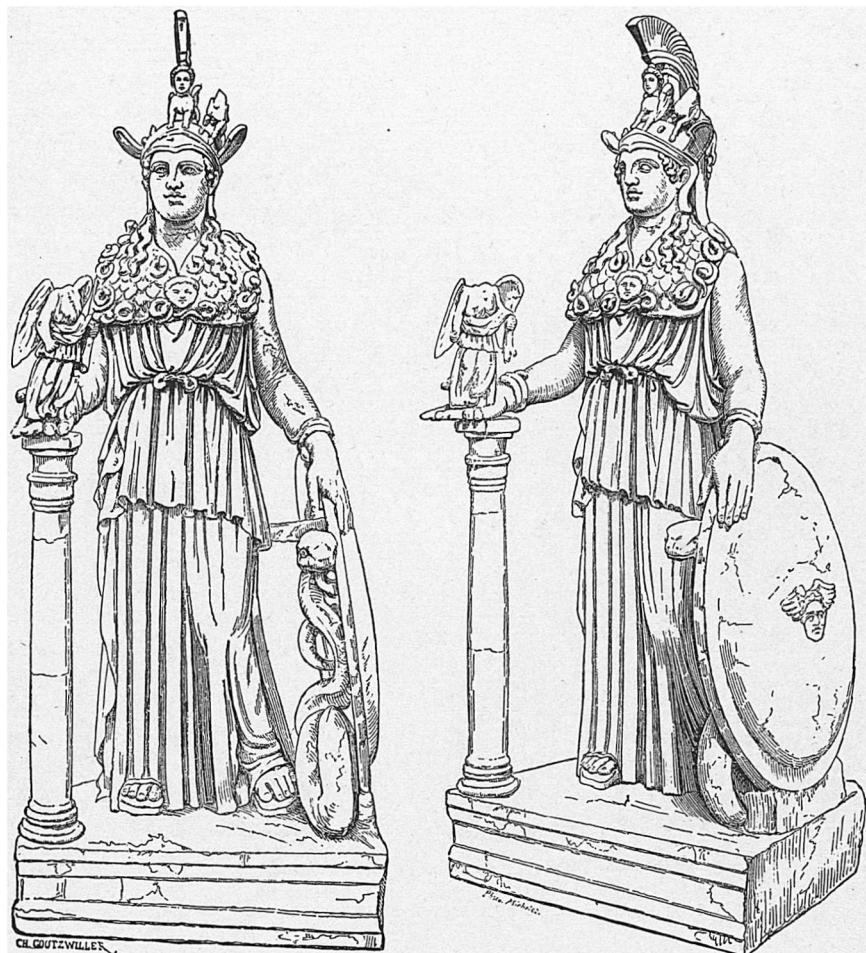


Fig. 2.—ATHENA PARTHENOS
FOUND AT ATHENS, NEAR THE VARVAKEION.
REPRODUCED FROM THE "GAZETTE DES BEAUX-ARTS."

¹ This head is still unpublished.

² *Der Parthenon*, Pl. XV. No. 2.



Fig. 3.—THE ATHENA OF THE THESEION.

REPRODUCED FROM THE "GAZETTE DES BEAUX-ARTS."

of medium size, and simply of bronze, is more praised than the Parthenos. No man can forever sustain himself at the same height, and it is quite possible that Pheidias was inferior to himself precisely in those works for which he had at his disposal the greatest material resources, and of which we moderns speak most frequently.

O. RAYET. (In *Gazette des Beaux-Arts.*)

¹ They are all collected in Michaelis, *Der Parthenon*, pp. 266-284; Overbeck, *Antike Schriftquellen*, Nos. 645-690; and in Otto Jahn and Michaelis, *Pausanias Descriptio Arcis Athenarum*, 2d ed., pp. 14-18.



Fig. 4.—TETRADRACHMA OF ANTIOCHOS VII.



Fig. 5.—COIN OF SARDIS.

when was it there? Had Pheidias himself placed it there, or had it, perhaps, been added upon the occasion of some restoration of his work? We know, indeed, that the Parthenos very soon began to crack. The generation which saw it put in place also saw its first complete restoration, and by how many other partial repairs must this restoration have been followed?

Our admiration for the great master instinctively inclines us to prefer the second supposition to the first. The idea that he might have been compelled to resort to such a clumsy artifice repels and shocks us. But however this may be, our repugnance is not an argument, and, in spite of ourselves, the question remains posed. Moreover, we must not forget that, in the numerous passages in ancient authors which refer to the Athena Parthenos,¹ its size and its richness are incessantly praised; but nowhere do we find signs of a sincere and profoundly felt admiration, like that which the Olympian Zeus called forth from all the world. Even the Lemnian Athena, although